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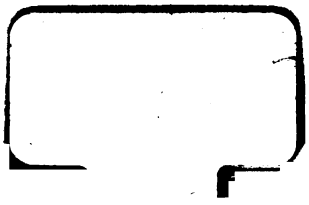
THAT IS WHAT LIFE MEANS TO ME -- A PLACE WHERE A FATHER ABOVE DEALS DIFFERENTLY WITH HIS DIFFERENT CHILDREN, BUT WITH ALL IN LOVE -- W.T.G.



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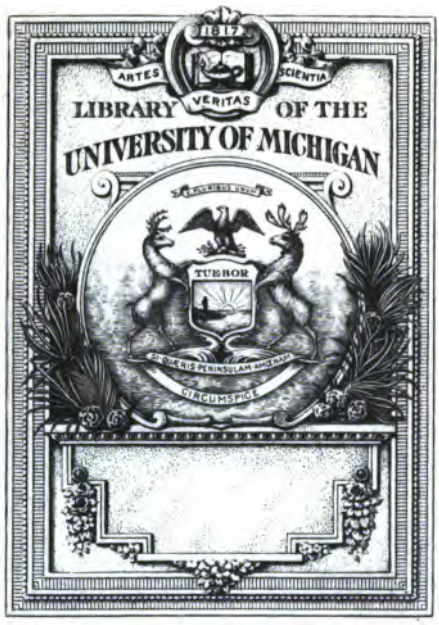

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WHAT LIFE MEANS TO ME

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WHAT LIFE MEANS TO ME

BY

WILFRED T. GRENFELL, M.D. (OXON.)
Superintendent Labrador Medical Mission

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WHAT LIFE MEANS TO ME

I WAS standing on the deck of the hospital steamer *Strathcona* to-day, overhauling a box of magazines and newspapers that had come to us from the United States. I was parceling some out to distribute to the delegates from a number of fishing-schooners that were anchored near, who had come, as fishing was temporarily slack, for "a bit o' readin'." As I turned over the pages of an old number of one, the title of an article caught my eye. It read, "What Life Means to Me."

I had been asked more than once to record my own views on this subject, so I carried it off to my chart room. I found it interested me mainly because, as an optimist, I could not agree at all with the views expressed. To be sure, in view of the eight years I spent among the purlieus of Whitechapel, the garrets and common lodging-houses around the East India docks, and, since, among the debt-ridden and often half-starved poor

of these Northern shores, I can understand how pessimists come into existence. The author states that life to him is an immense collection of human beings who are all trying to avoid being eaten.

Again in this article before me the author says: "The well-spring of joy and beauty has been dried up in me. The flowers no longer sing, nor the sunrise, nor the stars. Life to me means only getting my brothers and comrades ashore from a sinking ship." His part in life's drama he pleases to call socialism. I have heard some call this Christianity. I, at any rate, have not so learned Christ. Life to me is ever beautiful. Life is a thousand times worth while.

The scene has changed since I wrote the above sentence. We are now over four hundred miles farther north along the coast. A low barometer and the prospect of a dirty night have made us head our little vessel in toward the land to seek some shelter. For the Northern stream of Arctic ice outside us, and the titanic precipices that rise

to leeward, offer but a poor prospect out here for the night, if the gale increases.

Now, right overhead, more than three thousand feet in air, tower the marvelous cliffs of Mugford Cape. Beneath them our vessel is a mere speck on the ocean. Heavy clouds brood over the summits, so that, above, the rocky fastnesses disappear into eternity while at their feet lie stranded innumerable great bergs of ice, flanked with their dangerous streams of débris.

Night is already falling fast, and we have a long way yet to go to find an anchorage, while the darkness is gloomier and all the more impenetrable for the shadow of these mighty cliffs. The sun, buried in lurid red, has now entirely disappeared behind them, the very glories that he shed making so vivid a contrast with this gloom that he has left one's heart all the more dismayed for the comfort he so recently afforded us.

There will be no moon to-night, and the awful depths of these ice-cut fiords make anchorage possible only in one or

two places. No lights or guiding marks exist along this coast. There is no chart; no soundings have been recorded. Outside us now a heavy mantle of fog has closed down. It has hidden the lofty towers of Saddle Island, and left nothing that might serve to guide us between the sullen reefs that we know lie on both sides of him, thus preventing our seeking safety in the open sea. Indeed there is a general sense of desolation, as the wind howls around the precipices, that I have seldom, if ever before, experienced.

A young student whom I am carrying has just come on deck. "What a magnificent mass of mountains!" were his first words. "Jove! I never saw such a glorious effect in my life. Bothered if it wasn't worth spending a summer down here just to get this awe-inspiring combination. My! but it's fine!" Optimist though I am, I confess I was glad of another view-point just at that moment. After all, the shadows that seem to darken life are in reality only motes in the eye of him who thinks he sees.

Now, however, we are drawing in, and I can see the topmasts of a solitary schooner swinging boldly to anchor off this straight unprotected shore where, if the wind changes and chops round on to the land, she must at all hazards at once weigh anchor and fly for shelter as best she may. Her pluck has heartened us, however; so that we have now ranged up alongside and quite contentedly dropped our anchor in the deep water close to her. But for her presence we should have been anxious quite unnecessarily through the long hours till daybreak.

A Lesson from a Lowly Life

As soon as possible I went to visit her, and even as I climbed over the rail, I asked the captain the question, all-important to him at this late period of the year, "How's the fish, skipper?"

"Very scarce, doctor," he answered; "never scarcer. You may say there's nothing to it."

"Then I guess there won't be much for you to carry home to the wife and babes when you settle up in the fall."

"There'll be nothing but debt, I reckon, doctor. There'll be little enough to eat this winter, and less to keep the cold out, unless I'm much mistaken; for I don't expect to be able to look at clothing."

"What will you do then?"

"Leave 'em behind and get out of the country, I suppose, and look for work. Maybe I'll get a chance to earn a bit in the mines at Sydney or somewhere, so as to feed 'em and get an outfit for next fishery. Come below, won't you, doctor? Busy? No! Worse luck. There's no work to do, and it's cold standing here. We've hauled the net three times to-day, and not gotten enough to eat out of it."

"Of course I'll come below, and glad enough. What if Tom gets out his accordion and we have a tune? We're in the same box in one way as you are, and we'll lay here with you to-night." Tom being willing, his stimulating instrument was soon under way, and trouble sat light on our hearts.

From a sea chantey or two to a hymn of praise is not a long jump; and before

leaving we had "just a word of prayer together," that He who holds the world in the hollow of his hand might open that hand that his children might be fed — if it seemed good to him — seeing that we were doing all *we* could.

"Good night, doctor. It cheers one up to remember that God is on his throne. 'Tis good to believe that he's *our* Father, and will do right by his children. Good night." Little he realized as he spoke how much we had benefited by his humble company and his little schooner's presence.

"Good night, skipper; and, by the way, if the fish don't strike in and you can get up South a bit early, we want a man or two for a couple of months' work ourselves; so you'd better look in as you pass South. It may not be much, but it'll help out the bread basket."

"Good night, again; and — God bless you, doctor! Good night!"

Looking again at the article I have referred to, I see it contemptuously describes "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch" and such like literature as

"sugar-coated sentimentality." Well, I've seen the hearts of men with more philosophy than I could boast of, lifted out of the Slough of Despond by just such "sentimentality," and stirred to brave and kindly deeds by it, too. As a valuable asset in life, I say, give me plenty of it. The Christ had a use for it. It is an essential part of a life that is worth while.

A Token of Brotherliness

It was a gorgeous morning that broke next day, and the sunlight streaming through the great gorges and dancing over the sea surface gave every one of us quite a new view of the gloom of overnight. Moreover, I see the skipper's boat is alongside, and some men are in it heaving fish up on deck. Already he has sent us aboard a fine salmon, meshed in his leader, the first this year. It tasted as sweet as any salmon ever tasted. Memories of our talk of the previous night lent it a flavor that your epicure knows nothing of. It tasted of brotherliness — one of the sweetest tastes I know, and yet one

that the poorest of us can be giving away every day; surely a fact that of itself makes life a splendid thing of joy.

A Personal Definition

That is what life means to me — a place where a Father above deals differently with his different children, but with all in love; a place where true joys do not hang on material pegs, and where all the while the fact that God *our* Father is on his throne lines every cloud with gold. It means a chance for every one to be helping lame dogs over stiles, a chance to be cheering and helping to bear the burdens of others, a field for the translation of unfailing faith in the love of God above into deeds that shall please his children below, and therefore please him also — filling this poor life with satisfaction, otherwise unattainable. Nay, more, to tell the truth, the heaven I, like others, look for is not "a place to rest and be idle in," but is a place where "we shall run, and not be weary."

Beyond all this, life to me is a school in which to learn how best to serve, a

school in which we may be taught how best to employ and develop our special talents for service here and, I believe, hereafter. In order to achieve results, call it sentimentality or what you will, rather than accept any or all the "isms" for my teacher, I prefer to go to Jesus Christ and learn of him — of him who brought us the good news of God's love to us — individually; who showed that even a shameful death and a despised life does not affect the real value and joy of a life of love, and who dignified each human life by saying it even can be useful in that way to God above. Meanwhile, He seems to me to teach first, last, and always, that it is better not to exist at all than not to love; and this I most firmly believe; for

The night hath a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the whole world dies
With the setting sun.

The mind hath a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When love is done.

Overweighted Travelers

There can be no question about the Great Teacher's second lesson, namely, that life does not consist of the "things material" that a man possesseth. When the Australian miner was drowned because he had heavy bags of gold round his waist, while trying to swim ashore from the wreck, it was an open question which possessed which. Just so I am quite convinced that men stuffed with information or "the science of the day" are not always possessed of true wisdom. Wisdom itself anyhow is not an end, but a tool to work with.

Kings are to serve the people,
And wealth is to ease the poor,
And learning, to lift up the lowly,
And strength, that the weak may endure.

The turning of knowledge into service alone justifies the toil spent to achieve it, and gives it its true value in joyfulness.

Is Christ's teaching not true also, that men can be dead while they live? "Lives there the man with soul so dead," is not a contradiction. Existence isn't life. That self-indulgent debauchee

doesn't live, surely. The "high life" some men talk so much of is far more like the coma accompanying a high fever, to me, than the "fulness of life." "That which came into the world with Jesus Christ," says the unlearned fisherman, John, "was life."

The fact that ignorant, unlearned fishermen should be permitted to catch and record this truth for the benefit of the world is to me *prima facie* evidence that the teaching is not the outcome of mere humanly conceived philosophy. Jesus Christ himself says that "*He* came that *we* may have life, and may have it more abundantly."

Real Happiness

How many men to-day think still, if they think at all about it, that the Christ's follower is a man who has lost his freedom, a man whose life arena is contracted by the voluntary acceptance of Christ, or any one else, as his master! Many actually believe that because the disciple of Christ may not, dare not, damn his own body, or wrong his neighbor, and is told to love himself

last, that he must necessarily be cut off from the *joie de vivre*, as they term the joy of life. The life of the Christ follower involves no hair shirts, nor does he, in the twentieth century, picture the world as a dismal prison-house in which he must grind till he gain some golden shore beyond.

The fault is that men call that joy which merely tickles the taste, buds or indulges the more imperious animal passions, or that panders to their vanity. Surely we must far more truly call victory over self, joy. For, judged merely by a time standard, there can be no sweeter, long-lasting experience than to live a conscious victor in life's battle. Is not this yet one more of the Master's teachings — that achievement at whatever cost is God's true joy, and that even the loss of life means saving it? Death does not spell loss of life; unused talents mean really lost lives.

A Reminiscence of London Days

In my own life, when, at the feet of D. L. Moody, I first accepted Christ as

my Master, my Sundays, my only free days, formerly devoted to the usual young men's amusements and occupations, I devoted to holding open-air services and to visiting underground lodging-houses in Ratcliffe Highway. The change was so sudden that I was able to appreciate the contrast in my sensations. For it was a tremendous effort to me to be preaching at all, and that more especially in the open air and in the neighborhoods frequented by my fellow students. I had enjoyed the sensations of athletic victories, and I had carried off more than one material trophy; but there has never been any question in my mind as to which was the truest joy, that afforded by self-serving, or that by Christ-serving, either as first I saw it then, or as after twenty-five years, with somewhat altered perspective, I see it now.

To me now, any service to the humblest of mankind is Christ-service, however insignificant, and is therefore a legitimate reason for joy. Thus, for example, on these barren rocks of Labrador, any new source of food is of the

utmost value, and especially any vegetable food, among a people who for lack of it suffer so much from blackleg, foul mouths, and even die of "sailors' scurvy." One day we discovered, gathered, and cooked a dish of the native fungi and of wild parsley, and to our satisfaction found that we could eat them with relish — and without pain. This simple achievement has been of value since to not a few of our friends, and still gives us more pleasure than a certain midnight supper at "Sherry's," given regardless of expense, to which I was once taken.

Alas, the search for joy along the latter lines costs true manhood far more than the dollars expended on the food — it leads to blindness towards the real road to the *joie de vivre*. For my own help, I always keep pasted up in my surgery, where sometimes the continuous stream of patients coming to see the doctor calls for more sympathy than I have to give, and is apt to make one irritable and useless because unsympathetic, these old words:

He did kind things so kindly —
It seemed *His heart's delight*
To make poor people happy
From morning until night.

Any time I happen to look up, it is a clarion call to me, that if I would find joy, the real way is His way.

The man who walks in the Master's footsteps will be brave in opposition, cheerful in discouragement, and joyful in all life's fulness, as Christ himself was. To him it affords joy to be thoughtful of others, even when himself in trouble, as the Master was on his cross for his widowed mother. Any animal can

. . . . . be merry
When life goes along like a song;
But the *man* worth while is the man who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.

The True Source of Contentment

It is a simple fact, that, just as the virtues must spring from within and cannot be compelled from without, as they must arise from a new heart and not from fear of punishment, so true

and permanent satisfactions are in reality absolutely independent of things material. The perfect peace that *is* possible in life is not spelled by riches, leisure, or ornate surroundings. Peace is so shy a maiden that she cannot be caught by genius or wealth, cannot be gained by the lullaby of atheism or of false prophets, or by narcotizing the soul's sensibilities with abandonment or dopes. It is simply a physical impossibility. Peace is the gift of God the Father to his good children.

It may seem hard to the millionaire that there is something he cannot buy, or to the philosopher that just makes perfect and abiding peace elude his grasp. But it cannot be done. Mortals who forsake God, and are forsaken of him, know this, and more than one has sought the only other road to peace they can think of as open to them, namely, death; which, in another way, the man who forgets God also slowly but surely patronizes. The fact is, material possessions are only capable of giving *this* peace when used of the devil as a dope to the soul. I entirely

agree with an anonymous writer, who has said,

There is a jewel that no Indian mine
Can buy, no chemic art can counterfeit.
It makes men rich in greatest poverty;
Makes water wine, turns wooden cups to gold,
The homely whistle, to sweet music's strain —
This much-in-little, all-in-nought — Content,

and to me this content comes of being in line with Christ's will.

To me it is unintelligible how an immortal spirit can expect to enjoy the satisfaction of approving its own life outside "THE WAY"; or how, when sufficient time has elapsed to enable men to judge correctly of the real value to the world of a life, they can expect to allot the "well done" to any that have run counter to the teachings of the Christ, whatever their mental attitude towards his divinity may be. The life of the most wealthy and self-indulgent of Herods, or of the most orthodox and ascetic of high priests, bears no comparison ever with that of a real disciple of Christ, when a comparison of values is considered. No one

would for one moment put a drinking-cup, even if made of gold, on the same level with a fountain that refreshes thirsty people, more especially when we remember the dignity of the fountain, in that it gives power to men to run for themselves and not faint.

Brotherliness on the Labrador Coast

As I write, I have in tow from my little steamer two fishing-schooners. It is late in the season, and they have no fish. They have been three weeks pushing North, seeking fish all along this lonely coast. I have just brought them news that there is plenty of fish two hundred miles North. But where they had driven into the bay there isn't a breath of wind, though outside a fine, fair, southerly breeze is blowing. Now I have just dropped their cables, and all hands on both vessels are waving good-bye to us, because, forsooth, we have towed them a couple of miles out into the wind, and now they can go ahead themselves in the direction of success. One of my crew has just remarked, "Well, doctor, I'd rather

have done that for those poor fellows than have found fifty dollars, much as I need it." And I myself feel that more honor is due my beloved little vessel for this tiny service, than if, after a season's work, there wasn't a scratch on her paint from stem to stern. Shall we honor most an Essex who can afford to lavish money on entertaining kings, or a Sydney, who, in his own dire necessity, gave his helmet full of cold water to a dying common soldier, whose need he thought was greater than his own? "Bon vivant" — ugh! what a cynicism, if only men knew it. Only he who knows the Master has any conception of the good things of life — or how good those good things are.

As we passed down the shore yesterday, several times we nearly missed our way among the islands and shoals that lie in countless scores off this uncharted coast, because from inside on the land were blowing such dense clouds of smoke from an extensive forest fire that the horizon would often be totally obliterated. We thought we

saw things as they really were, and were entirely deceived. Gulliver from his height could appreciate the pity of the ridiculous strivings for unworthy aims of the tiny Lilliputians. So posterity, as the lapse of the ages removes the false glamour that at the time befogs the real value of men's lives, will pay homage only to those men who have, following the footsteps of the Master, rendered true service to the human race.

So, somehow, amidst all the fog and darkness through which my eyes now fail to pierce, I seem to feel that the peace which comes of our own approval of our life, and the appreciation which without any question the *vox populi* ever increasingly accords to real Christ-likeness, are pledges that the *vox Dei*, the final arbiter, will also, in spite of God's absolute knowledge of our failures, endorse as worth while whatever I have done in his service, as being the true fulfilment of his meaning for my life. Of all the lives ever lived, who will deny that that of the humble carpenter of Nazareth was the ideal life for a son of God? How many lives

do we not all know that lack only one thing to make them sweet and beautiful and invaluable — that one thing being his Spirit?

The fisherman John declares that his book was written in order that men might believe in the name of Jesus, and so might have life. The most distressful thing to me here in our life in Labrador is to see men losing opportunities, for each one does mean so much. Here, where men so often subsist close to the very margin line of starvation, waste of any kind is far the most discouraging thing to see. It makes one almost give up hope and throw up one's efforts altogether. If now they wilfully waste time, indulge themselves, and so enfeeble capacity, or do anything to cripple their utility, we shall of course have to deplore it. But our sorrow will be for the loss it will mean to them and those dependent on them, and not be mere pique because we are disobeyed.

So, it seems to me, must be God's view of our lives. The more he gives, the more there is to regret if lives are

wasted; and so important does such conduct make even God's effort to save the world that it was worth sending the Christ that we might be enabled to really learn the meaning of life.

My Ambition

I personally wish for the life of no Alexander, Cæsar, or Napoleon; no Crœsus or Midas, no Voltaire or Rousseau. The wealth of Herod or the learning of the Pharisees, after the lapse of centuries, I see clearly was of relatively little value, as He-who-knows counts assets. I would rather leave behind me on the sands of time the footsteps of a Judson or a Martyn or a Livingstone, of a Gordon or a Lincoln or a Lawrence, of a Lister or a Jenner or a Stevenson, than of any king, either of men, of finance, or of scholarship. Who would not be proud if posterity should accord him this tribute — that his life had been a reincarnation of Jesus Christ's?

At Williamstown, Massachusetts, stands a monument dated 1806, to commemorate where four students of

that class dedicated themselves to foreign missionary fields for Christ. To Adoniram Judson, the leader of these, men pay increasing homage as every commencement comes round. Despised then, his life alone of all that class continues to mean anything to the lives of men to-day.

This faith in Christ is a life factor to me. It is not so much a way of escape from sins and sins' punishment as a road to abundant achievement. It is a way to save, not my soul but my life. My mind lays more stress on "This is eternal LIFE, to know thee," than on "They shall not come into condemnation."

The Bigness of Life

This is the view one would expect of youth, and I can still claim the right to that view. It is the view-point of those who love life itself, of those who fix their eyes and hearts on the race and on running well in it, rather than of the trophy-hunter, who only looks at what he can get out of it. I believe absolutely in the socialism of Jesus —

"fraternity in action," as it has been called; because it dignifies and adds a *raison d'être* for being alive, viz., permitting us all "to descend into the abysses of sorrow and sin and help to bring out entombed comrades." Jesus distinctly says that his object in coming into the world at all was to bear witness to the truth that God is our individual Father, and we are brothers. He further says that the object of *our* lives is to perpetuate this message.

I have no quarrel with theology; I know none to quarrel with. What is beyond life's spectrum is a mystery to me. I do not know much of the ultra-red or ultraviolet either, except that there is power and force and wisdom existing there. But the play of colors between, with its high lights and its dark lines, I do know a little of, and I love it — just as I love our ocean down here, with its depths, its strength and its dangers, its colors and moods, its icy mountains, its trackless wastes, and yet withal its snug harbors and sheltering islands and warm land breezes.

Amidst just such shifting scenes the highest reward of life to me would be to be like Jesus. We must remember, however, that sugar must itself be dissolved to sweeten, and salt be itself melted to flavor. Still, even should that be called for, as it often is, then my view-point is Sir Galahad's, who said, "If I save my life, I lose it."

St. Paul once said, "To me to live is Christ," and again, "The life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God." Personally, my ideal in life would be to be able to say the same truthfully. For I must confess I remember when I would have had to say, "To me to live is self." As for me, I fully accept that God is my Father and men are my brothers. Life to me means being worthy of this our family.

The Beyond

As for life hereafter, I know little or nothing about it; but that is not of any great importance, because I want it, whatever it is.

The question whether life is worth living hasn't worried us down here

much. The only suicide I know of in Labrador was of a man who killed himself and his children because they were starving and couldn't live any longer anyhow. I see, however, that in the busiest centers of human activity, this question seriously, at intervals, seethes up to the surface, due, I suppose, to the mental strain and general hustle of life. Anyhow, it always makes me feel more satisfied with the simpler life, nearer to nature, that we live, away from the hubs of the universe.

For my part, I am very much in love with life; and I enjoy it so much, I want all I can get of it. I want more of it after the incident called death, if there is any to be had. Nor can there be any question — God or no God — that most other men love it, too. The struggle to exist offers undeniable evidence of this fact; while the struggle for the life of others, often at the cost of our own, shows it is no cold-as-death philosophy that plants the love of life in our hearts. No wonder that the man who voluntarily takes his own life is always dubbed by a generous world